



The Cleveland Museum of Art

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THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART PRESENTS HAUNTING PHOTOGRAPHS THAT EVOKE VANISHED JEWISH QUARTER OF BERLIN

(Cleveland, OH) About 18 large color prints by photographer Shimon Attie will appear in the exhibition **Shimon Attie Photographs: Writing on the Wall**, August 30 to November 7, 1996, at the Cleveland Museum of Art. Born in Los Angeles in 1957, Attie is a second-generation American—but his grandfather was a German Jew who lived in Berlin's *Scheunenviertel* district before coming to the U.S. in the 1930s. In the summer of 1991, thanks to fall of communism, Attie traveled to Berlin to see the place from which his grandfather had come. Attie recalls:

Walking the streets of the city that summer, I felt myself asking over and over again, Where are all the missing people? What has become of the Jewish culture and community which had once been at home here? I felt the presence of this lost community very strongly, even though so few visible traces of it remained. *The Writing on the Wall* grew out of my response to the discrepancy between what I felt and what I did not see. I wanted to give this invisible past a voice, to bring it to light.

His educational background in both psychology and art provided the ideal preparation for the project he envisioned and eventually carried out: a series of color photographs in which images of archival photographs made in the district in the 1920s and 30s would be projected onto the walls of the area as it is today—a way, for him, of bringing the past into the present.

The *Scheunenviertel* (the name derives from the barns, *Scheune*, built in many back yards to house farm animals brought by people moving from the country) was the quarter of the Jewish working class during the first three decades of this century. Most came from Russia or Poland, and most were reluctant to assimilate—the storefront signs were in Yiddish and Hebrew, and the residents continued to dress as they had before. Their Jewishness was highly visible, as Attie discovered as he delved into his project.

To create these striking images, the artist searched photographic archives for pictures taken in the area between WWI and WWII. He also needed to study old maps, as the East Ger-

man government had changed the names of all the streets to honor anti-fascist resistance fighters. He made transparencies from the old black-and-white photographs, then gathered up four slide projectors, a generator, and his camera equipment and went to the streets and buildings where those old pictures were made. In those places, in the evenings, he projected the images onto the walls, photographing the scenes in long, three- to four-minute exposures.

The resulting photographs are ghostly visions in which generations-old street scenes—views of cafe patrons, urchins leaning in the gutter, a police raid—are juxtaposed with the deep, somber colors of graffiti-scrawled contemporary Berlin. In connecting the present bomb-scarred, nearly vacant cityscape with the people who lived there 60 and 70 years ago, the photographs resonate with what happened between: Holocaust, World War, and half a century of grim decay. Said the *New York Times* in 1994, “The effects produced by Mr. Attie’s technique are uncanny, creating the sense that the surfaces of the scenes themselves are being peeled back like old wallpaper to reveal the history beneath them.”

Tom E. Hinson, the museum’s curator of contemporary art and photography, who organized the exhibition, sums up the power of these photographs: “An overwhelming sense of isolation, loss, and transformation permeates Attie’s emotionally gripping, dream-like photographs, with their layers of historic information rendered in stark colors.” Admission to this exhibition and to the museum is free.

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